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# ASOKA'S HUMANISM

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## PART FIRST

### ASOKA'S HUMANISM

The rule of the Mauryan dynasty signalized a high-water mark in the evolution of political thought in India during the third century B. C. Kautilya, the great Mauryan minister, gives a vivid description in his *Arthaśāstra* of the political ideal and practice of times. His chief aim was to implement political principles, intensify political activities, promote the ends of the state, safeguard the interests of government and protect the institution of kingship.

According to the Kautilyan principle, no government could function for the well-being of the people without effective harnessing and planned direction of political forces. With this end in view, Kautilya spared no pains in mobilizing all power to bring about the solidarity of the Mauryan state and kingship, and regularized the free play of the laws of politics and statecraft. The Mauryan state was political through and through. Directives at the unification of all diverse elements of the Mauryan state strengthened and enlivened the institution of kingship, and surcharged it with the spirit of politicization. In one word, the Mauryan state had thriven on the totalitarian principles of statecraft and politics.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I. Topa : The Minister as a King-Maker, Allahabad, 1941

Asoka the Great had a schooling in the Mauryan traditions. He was the Mauryan spirit incarnate. He was the product of the Mauryan political thinking. He carried in his person the Mauryan heritage. This Mauryan aspect of Asokā continued to affect all the phases of his personality till he fought the most 'bloody' war of Kalinga in order to actualize the dream of Mauryan political suzerainty. 'Chandasoka' of the Buddhist tradition might have been the typical Mauryan, who idealized in him the Mauryan political ideal and practice. To the Buddhist world, the Mauryan ideology was base, useless and harmful for all purposes.

The ideal of the Buddhists was to culturalize the lives of the people, while the Mauryans were after their politicization without weighing human welfare in the scale of ultimate values. Both represented ideals antagonistic to each other. The Mauryan ideal stood for the regimen of life on the basis of political principles. The Buddhist ideal also claimed the superiority of a regimen of life on the realization of cultural values. This clash of ideals—Mauryan and Buddhist—seems to disclose the mystery of 'Chandasoka' and his metamorphosis into a 'Dharmasoka'. Although the Thirteenth Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict brings out in bold relief the character of 'Chandasoka' as a true specimen of the Mauryan world, yet it shows the far-reaching change that had been set in his personality.

The Kalinga war opened Asoka's eyes to inherent dangers in the perpetuation of the supreme political organization for human welfare. Asoka so intensely visualized the soul-killing nature of the political state that his hatred for political principles, guiding and controlling the life of the state, set deep reactions in his

heart. To him the political state was an embodiment of grossest instincts, finding outlet and expression in the field of politics. It sheds human blood without remorse for realizing its ends; creates and fosters hatred and disunity among people and people; asserts its own feigned superiority over political powers by infusing awe, dread and fear in the lives of the people. As an ugly and crude instrument of political forces, it debases and dehumanizes the personality of man.<sup>2</sup>

After he had waded through human blood on the battle-field of Kalinga, it dawned upon him that the Mauryan state was rotten to the core and its further retention would mean the perpetuation of evil in an organized form. It was a demon-like power under the garb of parading virtues. The Thirteen Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict is a living confession of the futility of political principles of the Mauryan sovereign.

In the estimation of Asoka, war not only creates morbidity and callousness in man. It actually smothers all humane feelings and sentiments. Society, culture and civilization are destroyed at its hands. The laws of power politics sow seeds of hostility between country and country. The spirit of politics thrives on war. Right or wrong, war does not decide. The victory of power is no conquest of right. The success of politics and the victory in war are considered as political wisdom, but, in the scale of Asokan ethics, victory thus scored is no real victory. The psychological result of such a victory is the perpetuity of war between the conqueror and the conquered, because the foundation of their relationship is not laid on human values. The

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2. I. Topa: Hindustani Tamaddun, Hyderabad, 1943, pp. 182, 191

conqueror is and remains a conqueror, while the conquered is kept down as conquered. Between them no co-operation of purpose, no commonness of ideal or interest, no social integration can be possible. Thus war ends no war but perpetuates itself.

Having discredited the utility of gross political principles, Asoka rebuilt the foundation of the state on humanizing principles of common weal. He arrived at conclusions that man, society and the state could eventually prosper on cultural factors alone. Asoka emphatically disclaimed that man and society were for the state, viz the well-being of the state signified the welfare of man and society as expounded by Kautilya. To Asoka the *raison d'être* of the state was rooted in the idea of the welfare of man and society. For no other purpose except human welfare did the state exist. This was the fundamental difference between the Mauryan and Asokan conceptions of the state. As the all-comprehensive principle of the Asokan state was human welfare, it was for this reason alone that Asoka gave clear indications in his edicts that every moment of his life would be dedicated to the welfare of all men. In this way, he bridged the gulf of discrimination between the state and the people and laid the foundation of a new relationship based on common aspiration, interest and purpose.

Asoka brought home to the people through his edicts that he, was their father, they his children and the officials of the government their intelligent nurses. By adopting such a method of governance, Asoka made his point crystal clear that the link of human relationship between the state and the people could never be strengthened on the basis of fear and dread, exploitation and conquest. Thus by stamping out tyranny,

fear and dread, he paved the way for creating a new 'politics' based on a paternal relationship. Ahimsa as a principle of humanism was its fulcrum of activity. This paternal principle of governance conveyed him a deep sense of responsibility and obligation. He was too keen to discharge it as a father and the people as his children should feel obliged to him as their father. The culturalised Asokan 'state' thus resolved into a great family which was governed by the law of the heart.

The paternal law of Asoka was not only enacted for the people of his state. He acquainted the peoples of other states with the spirit of his paternal message through the principle of Ahimsa and assured them that they should not dread him as his behaviour towards them would be that of a father towards his children. He would regard their well-being and welfare as a father. Thus his adoption of a paternal principle towards them strikes at the root of political conception and purpose of the state viz. the establishment of political supremacy; the existence of diplomatic service and of 'six-fold policy'; the activities of espionage; the propaganda for political ends. Asoka was desirous of bringing the whole country under the sway of a humanized culture with a view to deadening the law of power politics and to developing the personality of man on the principle of humanism. This Asokan directive was a signpost of a new culture for man.

¶ The edicts of Asoka stand out pre-eminent as a challenge to the laws of politics and proclaim a new message of understanding, appreciation, and co-operation in the direction of human welfare.¶ The complete culturalization of the forces of politics, of the principles of government and of the aims of the state was the

avowed aim of Asoka who made it known through his edicts. He destroyed with his own hands the creation of the Mauryas without any remorse or compunction. The existence of the Mauryan political state was set at naught and in its place arose the Asokan 'state' as the upholder and promoter of cultural values.

Asoka found solace in the laws of the Buddha after his disillusionment. The undercurrents of the Buddhist world must have been effecting imperceptible changes in the evolution of the personality of Asoka. As the war of Kalinga shook him thoroughly, he realized the importance of Buddhism as a philosophy of activism. He did not give up the world and turn a recluse in the search of Nirvana in the world of non-activity and struggleless living. The message of the Buddha was an inspiration to him in the struggle of life. It is this aspect of Buddhism that touched his innermost chord. Asoka was a man of action. To lay down weapons as a defeatist was against his nature. Even his whole unhingement is a proof of his sterling qualities as a man of action. Turning his back to the world was impossible for the man in Asoka. Buddhism activized him. Its cultural bearing on life served as a quick incentive to his complete identification with the principles of individual and social welfare. Although Asoka ultimately became a staunch Buddhist in the orthodox sense of the term, yet he was not an orthodox, a bigot and a fanatic. He had none of the spirit of a persecutor or an inquisitor. His soul was saturated with humanistic culture.

The edicts not only reveal his evolutionary stages from the 'Upasaka' to a 'Buddha-Sakya' but also his all-absorbing interest in the preservation of the Bud-

dhist 'Trinity' and the promotion of the Buddhist doctrines.<sup>3</sup> Asoka's all-comprehensive genius worked itself out in interpreting the laws of the Buddha in a way that had baffled the minds of men of all times and climes. For the Buddhist world he was staunch among the staunchest and spared no pains in bringing about the unification of the diverse elements in the Buddhist world and the intensification of the Buddhist activity. He was responsible for disciplining the Buddhist order and encouraging the Buddhist literature among the Buddhists of the esoteric orders. In this respect his contribution was positive and permanent. The Buddhists extolled him for his true zeal in matters of welfare of the Buddhist world. Though Asoka was a great power and a pillar of strength for the Buddhists, his dynamic personality was still a greater power for the general development of the non-Buddhist people along cultural lines. Therein lay his real greatness. It was in the universalization of the Buddhist culture as humanised culture that made him supreme among the great kings of the world.

The promulgation of the Buddhist culture in the form of a humanized culture was Asoka's mission of life. That it could be adopted by all peoples without the distinction of caste, creed and country, was his faith. For him the philosophy of Buddhism was neither labyrinthine thoughts nor intellectual acrobaticism; it was a simple message of the cultivation of life-forces inherent in human personality. Asoka understood and

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3. The Sahasram Rock Inscription, p. 171

The Rupnath Rock Inscription, p. 167

The Maski Rock Inscription, p. 175

The Calcutta-Bairut Rock Inscription, pp. 173, 174

The Sarnath Pillar Inscription, pp. 162, 163

imbibed the true spirit of the Buddha and popularized it through his edicts. The Buddhist message of Asoka was clear and plain, simple and non-cryptic. He analysed and denuded Buddhism and out of it gleaned and garnèred what he considered as its 'basic', its nucleus and its essence.

The Buddha propounded his philosophy of life as a philosophy of commonsense and rationalism. To appreciate, understand and realize the true spirit of the laws of the Buddha presupposes an actively cultured mind. The Buddhist way was straight but uphill. Only those who had trained themselves in the Buddhist way could have gone far on the road of Buddhism or even reached their destination. But the masses steeped in ignorance and superstition could not tread the highway of Nirvana. Though the teachings of the Buddha had a profound influence on the lives of the people of his age as well as of succeeding ages, his real message was restricted to the Buddhist community only. But the culturalizing forces in Buddhism had worked wonders in humanizing man and society. Such Buddhist factors as a lever in the cultural upbuilding of the people were no unknown facts to Asoka. The resuscitation of Buddhism could be made possible, to a limited extent, through the Buddhist organizations but Buddhism as a humanized culture could universalize itself and become a common heritage for all peoples on the basis of its cultural force, inherent in the laws of the Buddha. It was this aspect of Buddhism that had impressed Asoka.

Asoka's dedication to such a humanized culture was an indirect service to Buddhism. The Buddhist culture signified to him harmony and co-operation in human relationship on the basis of peace and concord between peoples and peoples. This was its cardinal principle in the regulation of human affairs, which eventually

generated forces of social adjustment, understanding and co-operation. In such a realm of social peace, Asoka visualized the end of all disintegrating and corrosive elements in the lives of the people.

As the existence of the supreme political power and organization depends upon war and its paraphernalia, bringing in its trail the war-mindedness of the people, so the principle of peace negates the spirit of political aggrandizement and establishes a new human relationship between people and people as well as a new social order for promoting human welfare on the basis of human persuasion, understanding, appreciation and toleration. This was what Asoka tried to achieve through his cultural 'state'.

On the evidence of his edicts it becomes clear that Asoka differed from the kings of the past, who took no lively interest in the cultural development of their people. They ruled neither for their people nor in the interest of their people but for themselves. <sup>4</sup> Not the "sound of morality" but the "sound of drums" was heard in their realms. What Asoka wished to bring home was that the kings of the past lived for the perpetuation and realization of their political ends at the expense of human well-being and welfare. If it suited their political scheme, they did do some sort of public good. But the political well-being of the state was the main consideration in their cultural propaganda and activity. The people as human material for culturalization did not form the basis of their political progress. The people had to adjust and fit in their

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4. The Fourth Girnar Rock Edict, pp. 7, 8

scheme of power politics. The upbuilding of the state on the science of human relationship—understanding, co-operation and fusion—was beyond the comprehension of the kings of the past. Though the people as a chief factor in the life of the state are discussed in the ancient political literature on polity and government, they were not given their rightful place in the political organization according to the Asokan edicts.

Asoka was well aware of the fact that the kings of the past had taken no practical steps so that "the men might (be made to) progress by an adequate promotion of morality".<sup>5</sup> It was their wishful thinking or pious desire that never materialized. The state of the pre-Asokan period had no department which could promote cultural activities. No 'Dharma-Mahamatras' existed then.<sup>6</sup> The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict shows that "these are occupied with all sects in establishing morality; they are occupied with servants and masters for the happiness of those who are devoted to morality; they are occupied everywhere".<sup>7</sup>

(The Asokan 'state' undertook to discharge the function of educating the people in the Buddhist culture. It also aligned itself with the ideas of public weal. It was the spirit of public welfare that permeated the whole activity of the Asokan 'state'. The happiness of the people was the Asokan aim. The Asokan 'state' came into existence only for the welfare of the people.) "In times past", Asoka observes, "neither the disposal of affairs nor the submission of reports any time did exist before. But I have made the following

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5. The Seventh Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 133

6. The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 10

7. The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict, pp. 10, 11

arrangement. Reporters are posted everywhere with instructions to report to me the affairs of the people at any time, while I am eating, in the harem, in the inner apartment, even at the cowpen, in the palanquin and in the parks. Everywhere I am disposing of the affairs of the people.....For I am never content in exerting myself and in dispatching business; for I consider it my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men".<sup>8</sup> ✓

The radical change that had been wrought by Asoka in the spirit and form of the state was indicative of transvaluation of values. The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict is a serious utterance of Asoka. The affairs of the people were his affairs and their disposal was considered no easy task by him. He was of the opinion that unless he dedicated his entire life to the selfless service of the people, the responsibility of public welfare could not be discharged. For him there was no half-way house and to do public work in a half-hearted manner would be futile. (It was the ardent and burning desire of the man in Asoka to identify himself completely with the affairs of the people, so that he could be able to do real service to them.) He was also aware of the fact that without 'exertion' in the way of promoting the welfare of all men nothing could be achieved. To him this was the 'root' of all good work.<sup>9</sup> "For no duty is more important", observes Asoka, "than promoting the welfare of all men and whatever effort I am making is made in order that I may discharge the debt which I owe to living beings that I may make them happy in this world and that they may attain heaven in the other (world)." <sup>10</sup>

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8. The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict, pp. 12, 13

9. The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 13

10. The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 13

Being conscious of the 'debt' of service to all living beings and of his limitations in paying it back honourably, Asoka had to discipline and drill his sense of life to the higher needs and aspirations of humanity, or to the ideal of maximum good to all, as it was difficult to accomplish the ideal without great zeal.<sup>11</sup> The materialization of Asoka's mission rested upon his intense love and affection for the people, his unflagging exertion in attaining *summum bonum* for all, his undying zeal in promoting the welfare of all and his indomitable will in giving concrete shape to his ideal.

The Asokan ideal, the welfare of all men, arose out of the social philosophy of Buddhism. Asoka expounded it with a view to popularizing Buddhist culture for all men without the distinction of race, country and religion. It was not the drastic way of a rabid fanatic that he adopted for the actualization of his socio-cultural ideal, but sought it in unity and harmony among the diversified phases of life, social and domestic. Unless the whole life of a community is galvanized with the principle of humanism, it is futile to expect co-operation and fellow-feeling among the members of a family and the individuals of a society, as their behaviour and relationship are determined and regulated by their sense of mutual sympathy, self-restraint, regard and reverence. In this way, the family as a community in miniature can harmonize itself with the progressive living of a greater society of human beings.

For cultivating cultural values, the family members including elders and youngsters, friends and acquaintances, servants and slaves should become conscious of their mutual obligations towards one another. (Asoka

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11. The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 13

laid importance on obedience to elders and parents; on liberality to relatives, friends and acquaintances; on courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas; and on kindness to servants and slaves.) Thus the members of a family, while keeping the principle of humanism in tact, would succeed in cementing human relationship with the spirit of co-operation, unity, concord and goodwill. What Asoka meant to convey was that even the smallest, though important, units of a greater society should be a living model of human concord and happiness, but such units could function alone on the principles of social co-operation, unity and toleration.

In the multiplicity of social phenomenon, Asoka perceived the presence of the continuity of oneness of life, and its culturalization was his mission. That life in its myriad manifestations is exposed to dangers of exploitation, was no unknown fact to Asoka. The survival of all-pervading life depends upon the principle of the sanctity of life. It was the supreme duty of Asoka to preserve, develop and culturalize life-forces, as the destruction of life implied the end of all activities, human and non-human. The sanctity of life, as a Buddhist idea, is the basis for the development of human personality. In the higher struggle of life, it plays a great role in accomplishing its end in view, the salvation of life. Any attempt at its destruction is to let the work of the life-mission remain unfinished and incomplete. Only in its preservation can life unfold its hidden potentialities for its own good and well-being. The whole human personality is at the mercy of the concept of the sanctity of life. Such Buddhist ideas about the sanctity and preservation of life, Asoka laconically explained in his Girnar Rock Edict. <sup>12</sup>

The non-destruction of life creates in man a new sense of value, a new standard of morality and a new approach to human behaviourism. It humanizes instincts, ideas and actions, and tends to sublimate them. The underlying idea in the Asokan philosophy is to elevate the life of the people to a higher plane of thinking and living on the basic principle of the sanctity of life. As living is an art, not an erratic expression of life-forces in its crude form, so Asoka brings home the Buddhist view to all the peoples that right living requires certain conditions for its development and survival. He calls it "an ancient rule",<sup>13</sup> whereby he takes the Buddhist 'sting' out of it so that the principle of living may be acceptable to all without any bias or hindrance. This "ancient rule" comprises four cardinal principles on which life can flourish and prosper in accordance with the Asokan way.<sup>14</sup> Obedience, liberality, abstention and moderation are considered meritorious by Asoka. Under these active principles of culturalization, human instincts and behaviour help in the development of the sense of social discipline and control, of social concord and goodwill; of social integration and fusion; of social freedom and progress.

The training of an individual on lines of social education and culture, as envisaged by Asoka, leads to the 'promotion of morality'. Nearly all the Asokan edicts are replete with ideas and feelings of social morality. The word, Dhamma, as used in the edicts, signifies morality in the broadest sense of the term. Thus in the textual meaning Dhamma is a

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13. The Brahmagiri Rock Inscription, p. 178

14. The Brahmagiri Rock Inscription, p. 178

The Third Girnar Rock Edict, p. 5

self-culturalising principle for the general development of man in his individual as well as social capacities. Dhamma is not a creed of a particular sect. It is neither a negative assertion, nor a No to the urges of life. Dhamma is assertive, positive and a big Yea to life. It squares with the basic principle in all the religions of the world which claim the remaking of man on lines that promote human qualities and faculties. It was the unifying and unified spirit of Dhamma that Asoka made his own. It was the idea of universality and commonness in Dhamma with other religions that had a hold on him. Out of the basic concept of Dhamma, Asoka evolved and promulgated his own philosophy, to be appreciated by all as their common philosophy of life. In his own 'microcosm' of religion, he visualized a 'macrocosm' of universal religion. In his own person, the world reflected; in his own mind, the minds lived and experienced the universality of Dhamma. It was with such fervour and zeal that he expounded, through the edicts, the eternal principle of human likeness, sameness and oneness in all the peoples of the world. Man was to him the same man all over the world, whose likes and dislikes attracted and repelled him to the world. His belief has been that all human beings are living under immutable law.

Through the promotion of Dhamma, Asoka did not wish to create a society of utopians, cranky moralists, and spiritual maniacs, but men of robust commonsense and sanguine instincts. As the ultimate aim of Dhamma was the happiness of all human beings in this world as well as in the other world,<sup>15</sup> so Asoka made it plain to them that happiness could be achieved by all. The condition laid down was that it could not

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15. The First Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 119

be attained "without great love, careful examination great obedience, great fear (of sin) and great energy".<sup>16</sup> This clearly shows that the people have to realise the importance of cultural forces in the scheme of selfeducation for human progress and welfare. Asoka was too well aware of the inherent weakness of man. That a "person devoid of good conduct"<sup>17</sup> could not possibly come in line with the progressive attainments of those who had earned the credentials of Dhamma, was Asoka's belief. 'Human discipline, bestowing meaning and content to life, is the necessary condition to 'good conduct'. What Asoka meant was that man requires certain moral assets to neutralize the disintegrating forces in his own person. He made it too plain in his edicts that "sin is easily committed",<sup>18</sup> and that "it is difficult to perform virtuous deeds".<sup>19</sup> The idea of 'sin' as conceived by Asoka was different from that of a moralist. 'Passions' of 'fierceness cruelty, anger, pride, envy' tend to undermine, demean and de-culturalize the personality of man.<sup>20</sup> Asoka considered these 'sinful'.<sup>21</sup> The Asokan insight into the working of human mind reveals the fact that men "do not at all regard (their) evil deeds (thinking)"<sup>22</sup> The committal of 'evil deeds' or 'sin' is the result of a non-thinking attitude of mind, and the 'virtuous deeds' are done deliberately and consciously. Asoka looked at evil deed as a de-culturalizing process and virtuous

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16. The First Dehli-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 120.

17. The Fourth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 8

18. The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 10

19. The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 10

20. The Third Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 122

21. The Third Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 122

22. The Third Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 122

deed as a process of culturalization. (In the culturalization of man, "compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness and goodness" are essential factors that go to bestow "the gift of spiritual insight".<sup>23</sup> This is the message of Dhamma which Āsoka broadcast to the people of the world.) For the progress of Dhamma, Asoka adopted two ways: moral restriction and conversion. In the Asokan scale of ultimate values "moral restriction is of little consequence" as compared with 'conversion' that promotes Dhamma considerably.<sup>24</sup> The edicts of Asoka give a vivid picture of the Asokan propaganda and activity in the promulgation of Dhamma either by moral restriction or by conversion, but no evidence is forthcoming on the data of edicts that Asoka only insisted on the conversion of the people. To him, conversion was a desideratum, an ideal to be pursued constantly and incessantly, but "there is no such gift as the gift of morality, or acquaintance through morality, or the distribution of morality, or kinship through morality".<sup>25</sup>

In the realm of Asoka, all classes and sects of people resided. Their conversion would have been an impossible task. The greatness of the Asokan genius exhibited itself in the promotion, acquaintance, distribution and kinship of the basic principles of Dhamma in consonance with the different sects or religions. The Buddhist culture engendered forces that Buddhified the whole atmosphere of the Asokan 'state'. The edicts bear testimony to the fact that the Buddhist

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23. The Second Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 121  
The Seventh Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 136  
24. The Seventh Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 137  
25. The Eleventh Girnar Rock Edict, p. 19

culture progressed far and wide, and set deep in the hearts of the people. The Seventh and Twelfth Girnar Rock Edicts are glaring and outstanding examples of the Asokan principle of tolerance towards all sects residing in the kingdom of Asoka. He gave them freedom to follow their religions, but made them realize the importance of "self-control and purity of mind",<sup>26</sup> as enjoined by their religions, in conformity with the basic principles of Dhamma.<sup>27</sup> Asoka explained to them that the humanizing force of "great liberality" would be reduced to nothingness, if "self-control, purity of mind, gratitude and firm devotion" were lacking in them.<sup>28</sup> Indirectly, Asoka encouraged Dhamma through the ideologies of the different living sects or religions of his time. He showed them their way according to their lights, but that was the Buddhist way. The Twelfth Girnar Rock Edict shows the working of the Asokan mind in bringing about cultural transformation of all sects or religions on the amalgam of Dhamma.

In this way, Asoka established a true ideal for the man of religion as Buddhist or non-Buddhist. It was the burning desire of Asoka to attain either glory or fame in the socio-cultural domain of Dhamma and not in the sphere of power politics.) "King does not think," reads the Tenth Girnar Rock Edict. "that either glory or fame conveys much advantage, except (on account of his aim that) in the present time, and in the distant (future), men may (be induced) by him to practise obedience to morality and that they may conform to

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26. The Seventh Girnar Rock Edict, p. 14

27. The Twelfth Girnar Rock Edict, pp. 21,22

28. The Seventh Girnar Rock Edict, p. 14

the duties of morality. On this (account) king is desiring glory and fame. But whatever effort king is making, all that is for the sake of merit in the other world and in order that all men may run little danger".<sup>29</sup> In the popularization of Dhamma, Asoka hoped to achieve glory or fame which meant that he would be an active instrument in bestowing the 'gift of morality' or the 'benefit of morality' on all men. So glory or fame signified to him the ultimate victory of Dhamma in the lives of all peoples.)

The cultural activities of Asoka were not confined to the people of his own kingdom. "The unconquered borderers" outside his kingdom were also addressed by him. His message to them reveals his hatred for the idea of political conquest, aggrandizement and exploitation. As a cosmopolitan Buddhist, his heart yearned to welcome the 'outsiders' into a common brotherhood of Dhamma. The Second Separate Dhauili Rock Edict levels down the concepts of a political state, of political suzerainty, of political domination. It is an open chapter written by Asoka for all men to read with their own eyes the futility of political maxims and practices, of artificial barriers between country and country, between people and people, between state and state. The loftiness of the personality of Asoka is in the cosmopolitan way. As a real cultured man and not as a king-conqueror, he approached the "unconquered borderers" with a heart full of sympathy, affection and humaneness. Here lies the greatness of Asoka's achievement in the field of humanization.

" (This) alone is my wish with reference to the

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29. The Tenth Girnar Rock Edict, p. 18

borderers," Asoka explains himself, "that they may learn that Devanampriya..... that they may not be afraid of me, but may have confidence (in me); that they may obtain only happiness from me, not misery; that they may (learn) this, that Devanampriya will forgive them what can be forgiven; that they may (be induced) by me (to) practise morality; (and) that they may attain (happiness in) this world and (in) the other world.....they may learn that Devanampriya is to them like a father; that Devanampriya loves them like himself, and that they are to Devanampriya like (his own) children." <sup>30</sup>

It is an undeniable fact that Asoka delivered through the instrumentality of his edicts the message of Dhamma, but certain edicts were his special messages to those who looked after the welfare of the people. These disclose the working of the Asokan scheme of humanization. Steps that were taken by Asoka to materialize the ideal of humanism were of practical nature. ( He himself was a zealous and untiring worker in the cause of Dhamma through his 'tours of morality'. In this way, he came in direct touch with the people, "instructing them in morality and questioning them about morality").<sup>31</sup> Asoka was a personification of the spirit of Dhamma. He also instructed his Mahamatras in the spirit of Dhamma with a view to achieving his ideal through their active agency. As these were the high officers of the Asokan 'state' who "were occupied with many thousands of men, with the object of gaining the affection of men," <sup>32</sup> they should remember in their

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30. The Second Separate Dhauili Rock Edict, pp. 99,100

31. The Eighth Jaugada Rock Edict, p. 109

32. The First Separate Jaugada Rock Edict, p. 114

dealings with the people that all men were the children of Asoka, <sup>33</sup> and as on behalf of his own children, he desired that they should be provided with complete welfare and happiness in this world and in the other world, the same he desired also on behalf of all men. <sup>34</sup> The Mahamatras must pay attention to such instructions in the discharge of their work. They should ever be ready to administer justice to all without any traces of impartiality. Asoka was of the opinion that "he who is fatigued in the administration of justice, will not rise, but one ought to move, to walk, and to advance." <sup>35</sup> The failure of the Mahamatras in the rightful observance of duties was not only "a great evil" in itself but it would be a hindrance in the realization of the Asokan ideal. <sup>36</sup> To other officers (Lajukas) of the Asokan 'state' he brought home that the welfare and happiness of the country people was their prime duty and they were to look after them like an 'intelligent nurse'. <sup>37</sup>

This is how Asoka, not in his personal capacity alone but also through his 'agents', discharged the debt of Dhamma honourably. In propagating and popularizing Buddhist culture, the Asokan edicts are the real source of inspiration to the people of all times. During the time of Asoka, the people were persuaded to penetrate into the meaning and significance of the edicts and to realize the part they had to play in achieving the Asokan ideal. By creating a new socio-cultural 'state' for the well-being and happiness of the people, Asoka served the cause of Dhamma in the light of humanism.

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33. The First Separate Dhauili Rock Edict, p. 95

34. The First Separate Dhauili Rock Edict, p. 95

35. The First Separate Dhauili Rock Edict, p. 99

36. The First Separate Dhauili Rock Edict, p. 115

37. The Fourth Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict, p. 124

## PART SECOND

## THE EDICTS OF ASOKA

Asoka the Great ruled the Kingdom of Magadha and his reign lasted from c. 269 B. C. to 232 B.C. He was the King of kings as a humanist.

He became a Buddhist after his 'rebirth' on the battle-field of Kalinga and inaugurated a new era of peace and happiness for all men. As a man Asoka was a zealous Buddhist, but as a king he was an unrivalled specimen of humanity. How a Buddhist and a humanitarian blended in the personality of Asoka is a miracle of the inter-play of the forces of human heart and mind. Buddhism as humanised culture, he preached, promulgated and established for men of all religions as a king. That is the central theme running in all his edicts. His Dhamma was pure humanism as the religion of man. This was how he interpreted Dhamma in terms of human welfare and happiness.

The edicts of Asoka are a living testimony of his genius as a king and man. They depict the philosophy of humanised culture, of which he himself was its true representative.

The underlying idea in reproducing a selection of the Asokan edicts in the original through translation

is to afford an opportunity for their study with a view to comprehending and appreciating Asoka's cultural message. As the whole personality of Asoka is embedded in his edicts, so it is impossible to understand him without their study. Thus the Asokan edicts tell their own tale in a simple way.

### (1) ASOKA AS AN UPĀSAKA

“Devanampriya (speaks) thus :

....      .... years since I am a lay-worshipper (Upasaka).  
But (I had) not been very zealous.”

*The Sahasram Rock Inscription*

### (2) ASOKA AS A BUDDHA-SAKYA

“(A proclamation) of Devanampriya Asoka.

Two and a half years (and some what more)  
(have passed) since I am a BUDDHA-SAKYA.”

*The Maski Rock Inscription*

### (3) ASOKA WELCOMES THE SAMGHA

“The Magadha king Priyadarsin, having saluted the SAMGHA, hopes they are both well and comfortable.

It is known to you, Sirs, how great is my reverence and faith in the BUDDHA, the D H A R M A,\*  
(and) the SAMGHA.

Whatsoever, Sirs, has been spoken by the blessed BUDDHA, all that is quite well spoken.

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\* i. e., the Buddhist doctrine.

But, Sirs, what would indeed appear to me (to be referred to by the words of the scripture): 'thus the true DHARMA will be of long duration', that I feel bound to declare.

The following expositions of the DHARMA, Sirs, (viz.) the VINAYA-SAMUKASA, the ALIYA-VASAS, the ANAGATA-BHAYAS, the MUNI-GATHAS, the MONEYA-SUTA, the UPATISAPASINA, and the LAGHULOVA which was spoken by the blessed BUDDHA concerning falsehood, I desire, Sirs, that many groups of monks and (many) nuns may repeatedly listen to these expositions of the DHARMA, and may reflect (on them).

In the same way both laymen and laywomen (should act).

For the following (purpose), Sirs, am I causing this to be written, (viz.) in order that they may know my intention."

*The Calcutta-Bairat Rock Inscription*

(4) THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SAMGHA

" (cannot) be divided.

The SAMGHA both of monks and of nuns is made united as long as (my) sons and great-grandsons (shall reign, and) as long as the moon and the sun (shall shine).

The monk or nun who shall break up the SAMGHA, must be caused to put on white robes and to reside in a non-residence.

For my desire is that the SAMGHA may be united (and) of long duration."

*The Samchi Pillar Inscription*

" Deva(nampriya)                      ....                      ....  
      ....      Pata(liputra)                      ....                      ....  
      ....      the SAMGHA (cannot) be divided by any  
                  one.

But indeed that monk or nun who shall break up the SAMGHA, should be caused to put on white robes and to reside in a non-residence.

Thus this edict must be submitted both to the SAMGHA, of monks and to the SAMGHA of nuns.

Thus speaks Devanampriya :

Let one copy of this (edict) remain with you deposited in (your) office; and deposit ye another copy of this very (edict) with the lay-worshippers.

These lay-worshippers may come on every fast-day (posatha) in order to be inspired with confidence in this very edict; and invariably on every fast-day, every MAHAMATRA (will) come to the fast-day (service) in order to be inspired with confidence in this very edict and to understand (it).

And as far as your district (extends), despatch ye (an officer) everywhere according to the letter of this (edict).

In the same way cause (your subordinates) to despatch (an officer) according to the letter of this (edict) in all the territories (surrounding) forts."

*The Sarnath Pillar Inscription*

## (5) ASOKA—A ZEALOUS BUDDHIST

“Devanampriya speaks thus:

Two and a half years and somewhat more (have passed)  
since I am openly a SAKYA.

But (I had) not been very zealous.

But a year and somewhat more (has passed) since I  
have visited the SAMGHA and have been very  
zealous.

Those gods who during that time has been unmingled  
(with men) in Jambudvīpa, have now been made  
(by me) mingled (with them).

For this is the fruit of zeal.

And this cannot be reached by (persons of) high rank  
(alone), (but) even a lowly (person) is able to  
attain even the great heaven if he is zealous.

And for the following purpose has (this) proclama-  
tion been issued, (that) both the lowly and the  
exalted may be zealous, and (that) even (my)  
borderers may know (it), (and) that the same  
zeal may be of long duration.

For, this matter will (be made by me to) progress, and  
will (be made to) progress considerably. ”

*The Rupnath Rock Inscription*

## (6) THE KINGS OF THE PAST AND DHAMMA

“King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

The kings who were in times past, had this desire,  
that men might (be made to) progress by the

promotion of morality; but men were not made to progress by an adequate promotion of morality.

Concerning this, King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

The following occurred to me.

On one hand, in times past kings had this desire, that men might (be made to) progress by an adequate promotion of morality; (but) on the other hand, men were not made to progress by an adequate promotion of morality."

*The Seven Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

(7) MEANING AND CONCEPTION OF DHAMMA

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

This rescript on morality was caused to be written by me (when I had been) anointed twenty-six years.

(Happiness in this (world) and in the other (world) is difficult to acquire without great love of morality, careful examination, great obedience, great fear (of sin), (and) great energy....."

*The First Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

(To Practise) morality is meritorious; but what does morality include?

(It includes) few sins, many virtuous deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, (and) purity.

The gift of spiritual insight also has been bestowed by me in many ways.

On bipeds and quadrupeds, on birds and aquatic animals various benefits have been conferred by me, (even) to the boon of life.

And many other virtuous deeds also have been performed by me.

And he who will act thus will perform good deeds."

*The Second Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus :

(Men) regard only (their) virtuous deeds, (thinking) :  
' This virtuous deed has been performed by me '.

They do not at all regard (their) evil deeds. (thinking) :  
' This evil deed has been performed by me ; this very (act) is called a sin.'

Now this is indeed difficult to recognize,

But indeed this ought to be regarded thus :

' These (passions), viz. fierceness, cruelty, anger, pride, envy, are called sinful. Let me not ruin (myself) by (these) very (passions) '.

The following ought to be specially regarded :

' This (action conduces) to my (happiness) in this (world), that other (action) to my (happiness) in the other (world) ' . "

*The Third Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

(8) THE GIFT OF DHAMMA

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus :

There is such gift as the gift of morality, or acquaintance through morality, or the distribution of morality, or kinship through morality.

Herein the following are (comprised), (viz.) proper courtesy to slaves and servants, obedience to mother (and) father, liberality to friends, acquaintances, and relatives, to Brahmanas and Sramanas, (and) abstention from killing animals.

Concerning this a father, or a son, or a brother, or a friend, an acquaintance, or a relative, (or) even (mere) neighbours, ought to say: 'This is meritorious. This ought to be done.'

If one is acting thus, the attainment of (happiness) in this world is (secured), and endless merit is produced in the other (world) by the gift of morality."

*The Eleventh Girnar Rock Edict*

(9) HAPPINESS THROUGH DHAMMA

"King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

(When I had been) anointed twelve years, rescripts on morality were caused to be written by me for the welfare and happiness of the people, (in order that), not transgressing those (rescripts), they might attain a promotion of morality in various respects.

(Thinking): 'thus the welfare and happiness\* of the people (will be secured)'. I am directing my attention not only to (my) relatives, but to those who are near and far, in order that I may lead them to happiness, and I am instructing (them) accordingly.

In the same manner I am directing my attention to all classes.

And all the sects have been honoured by me with honours of various kings.

But this is considered by me (my) principal (duty), viz. visiting (the people) personally."

*The Sixth Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

(10) THE MASTERY OF DHAMMA

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

It is difficult to perform virtuous deeds.

He who starts performing virtuous deeds accomplishes something difficult.

Now, by me many virtuous deeds have been performed.

Therefore (among) my sons and grandsons, and (among) my descendents (who shall come) after them until the aeon of destruction (of the world), those who will conform to this (duty) will perform good deeds.

But he who will neglect even a portion of this (duty) will perform evil deeds.

For sin is easily committed."

*The Fifth Girnar Rock Edict*

(11) THE GLORY OF DHAMMA

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin does not think that either glory or fame conveys much advantage,

except (on account of his aim that) in the present time, and in the distant (future), men may (be induced) by him to practise obedience to morality, and that they may conform to the duties of morality.

On this (account) king Devanāmpriya Priyadarsin is desiring glory and fame.

But whatever effort King Devanāmpriya Priyadarsin is making, all that (is) for the sake of (merit) in the other (world) (and) in order that all (men) may run little danger.

But the danger is this, viz. demerit.

But it is indeed difficult either for a lowly person or for high one to accomplish this without great zeal (and without) laying aside every (other aim).

But among these (two) it is indeed (more) difficult to accomplish for a high (person)."

### *The Tenth Girnar Rock Edict*

" King Devanāmpriya Priyadarsin does not think that either glory or fame conveys much advantage, except whatever glory or fame he desires (on account of his aim) that in the present time, and that they may conform to the duties of morality.

On this (account) King Devanāmpriya Priyadarsin is desiring glory and fame.

But whatever effort King Devanāmpriya Priyadarsin is making all that (is) only for the sake of (merit) in the other (world), (and) in order that all (men) may be free of danger.

But the danger is this, viz. demerit.

But it is indeed difficult for a lowly person or for a high one to accomplish this without great zeal (and without) laying aside every (other aim.)

*The Tenth Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict*

(12) DHAMMA—NOT CEREMONIALISM

“ King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus :

Men are practising various ceremonies during illness, or at the marriage of a son or a daughter, or at the birth of a son, or when setting out on a journey ; on these and other (occasion) men are practising various ceremonies.

But in such (cases) women are practising many and various vulgar and useless ceremonies.

Now, ceremonies should certainly be practised.

But ceremonies like these bear little fruit indeed.

But the following practice bears much fruit, viz., the practice of morality.

Herein the following (are comprised), (viz.) proper courtesy to slaves and servants, reverence to elders, gentleness to animals, (and) liberality to Brahmanas and Sramanas; these and other such (virtues) are called the practice of morality.

Therefore a father, or a son, or a brother, or a master ought to say :- ‘ This is meritorious. The practice should be observed until the (desired) object is attained.’

And it has been said also: 'Gifts are meritorious'.

But there is no such gift or benefit as the gift of morality or the benefit of morality.

Therefore a friend, or a well-wisher, or a relative, or a companion should indeed admonish, (another) on such and such an occasion:- 'This ought to be done; this is meritorious. By this, (practice) it is possible to attain heaven.'

And what is more desirable than this, viz. the attainment of heaven?"

### *The Ninth Girnar Rock Edict*

"For such ceremonies are of doubtful (effect).

One may attain his object (by them), but he may not (do so).

And they (bear fruit) in this world only.

But that practice of morality is not restricted to time.

But if one does not attain (by it) his object in this (world), then endless merit is produced in the other (world).

But if one attains (by it) his object (in this world), the gain of both (results) arises from it; (viz.) the (desired) object (is attained) in this (world) and endless merit is produced in the other (world) by that practice of morality."

### *The Ninth Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict*

(13) WAYS AND MEANS FOR  
PROMOTING DHAMMA

“—But indeed by my instruction this regard for morality and love of morality have been promoted day by day and will progress still (more).

And my agents also, both the high ones, and those of middle rank, are conforming (morality), (and are thus) able to stir up fickle (persons).

In the same way the MAHAMATRAS of the borderers also (are acting).

For (their) instruction (is) this, viz. to protect according to morality, to dispose according to morality, to cause pleasure according to morality, (and) to guard (their speech) according to morality.”

*The First Delhi-Topra Pillar-Edict*

“ In times past, for many hundreds of years, there had ever been promoted the killing of animals and the hurting of living beings, discourtesy to relatives, (and) discourtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas.

But now, in consequence of the practice of morality on the part of king Devanampriya Priyadarsin, the sound of drums has become the sound of morality showing the people representations of aerial chariots, representations of elephants, masses of fire, and other divine figures.

Such as they had not existed before for many hundreds of years, thus there are now promoted, through the instruction in morality on the part of king

Devanāmpriya Priyadarśin abstention from killing animals, abstention from hurting living beings, courtesy to relatives, courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramāṇas, obedience to mother (and) father (and) obedience to the aged.

In this and many other ways is the practice of morality promoted.

For this is the best work, viz. instruction in morality.

And the practice of morality is not (possible) for (a person) devoid of good conduct.

Therefore promotion and not neglect of this object is meritorious.

### *The Fourth Girnar Rock Edict*

"King Devanāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks thus.

In times past neither the disposal of affairs nor the submission of reports at any time did exist before.

But I have made the following (arrangement)

Reporters are posted everywhere, (with instructions) to report to me the affairs of the people at any time, while I am eating, in the harem, in the inner apartment, even at the cowpen, in the palanquin, and in the parks.

And everywhere I am disposing of the affairs of the people.

And if in the council (of MAHAMATRAS) a dispute arises, or an amendment is moved, in connexion with any donation or proclamation which I myself

am ordering verbally; or (in connexion with) an emergent matter which has been delegated to the MAHAMATRAS; it must be reported to me immediately, anywhere, (and) at any time.

Thus I have ordered.

For I am never content in exerting myself and in dispatching business,

For I consider it my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men.

But the root of that (is) this, (viz.) exertion and the despatch of business.

For no duty is more important than (promoting) the welfare of all men.

And whatever effort I am making, (is made) in order that I may discharge the debt (which I owe) to living beings, (that) I may make them happy in this (world), and (that) they attain heaven in the other (world).

But it is difficult to accomplish this without great zeal."

*The Sixth Girnar Rock Edict*

"In times past kings used to set out on pleasure-tours.

On these (tours) hunting and other such pleasures were (enjoyed).

But when King Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed ten years, he went to Sambodhi.

Therefore these tours of morality (were undertaken).

On these (tours) the following takes place, (viz.)  
 visiting Brahmanas and Sramanas and making gifts  
 (to them), visiting the aged and supporting (them)  
 with gold, visiting the people of the country,  
 instructing (them) in morality, and questioning  
 (them) about morality, as suitable for this  
 (occasion)."

*The Eighth Girnar Rock Edict*

"How then might men (be made to) conform to  
 (morality) ?

How might men (be made to) progress by an adequate  
 promotion of morality ?

How could I elevate them by the promotion of morality ?

Concerning this, king Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks  
 thus:

The following occurred to me.

I shall issue proclamations on morality, (and) shall order  
 instruction in morality (to be given).

Hearing this, men will conform to (it), will be elevated,  
 and will (be made to) progress considerably by the  
 promotion of morality.

For this purpose proclamations on morality were issued  
 by me, (and) manifold instruction in morality was  
 ordered (to be given), (in order that those agents)  
 (of mine) too, who are occupied with many people,  
 will exhort (them) and will explain (morality to  
 them) in detail.

The LAJUKAS, also... who are occupied with many hundred thousands of men,—these, too, were ordered by me: 'In such and such a manner exhort ye the people who are devoted to morality.'

Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus

Having in view this very (matter), I have set up pillars of morality, appointed MAHAMATRAS of morality, (and) issued (proclamations) on morality.

King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

On the roads banyan-trees were caused to be planted by me, (in order that) they might afford shade to cattle and men, (and) mango-groves were caused to be planted.

And (at intervals) of eight kos wells were caused to be dug by me, and flights of steps (for descending into the water) were caused to be built.

Numerous drinking-places were caused to be established by me, here and there, for the enjoyment of cattle and men.

(But) this so-called enjoyment (is) (of little consequence).

For which various comforts have the people been blessed both by former kings and by myself.

But by me this has been done for the following purpose: that they might conform to that practice of morality.

Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

Those my MAHAMATRAS of morality, too are

occupied with affairs of many kinds which are beneficial to ascetics as well as to householders, and they are occupied also with all sects.

Some (MAHAMATRAS) were ordered by me to busy themselves with the affairs of the SAMGHA; likewise others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with the Brahmanas (and) Ajivikas; others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with the Nirgranthas; others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with (other) sects; (thus) different MAHAMATRAS (are busying themselves) specially with different (congregations).

But my MAHAMATRAS of morality are occupied with these (congregations) as well as with all other sects.

King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

Both these and many other chief (officers) are occupied with the delivery of the gifts of myself as well as of the queens, and among my whole harem (they are reporting) in divers ways different worthy recipients of charity both here and in the provinces.

And others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with the delivery of the gifts of (my) sons and of other queens' sons, in order (to promote) noble deeds of morality (and) the practice of morality.

For noble deeds of morality and the practice of morality (consist in) this, that (morality) viz. compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness, and goodness, will thus be promoted among men.

King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

Whatsoever good deeds have been performed by me,  
those the people have imitated, and to those they  
are conforming.

Thereby they have been made to progress and will (be  
made to) progress in obedience to mother and  
father, in obedience to elders, in courtesy to the  
aged, in courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas, to  
the poor and distressed, (and) even to slaves and  
servants.

King Deyanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

Now this progress of morality among men has been  
promoted (by me) only in two ways, (viz.) by  
moral restrictions and by conversion.

But among these (two), those moral restrictions are of  
little consequence; by conversion, however,  
(morality is promoted) more considerably.

Now moral restrictions indeed are these, that I have  
ordered this, (that) certain animals are inviolable.

But there are also many other moral restrictions which  
have been imposed by me.

By conversion, however, the progress of morality  
among men has been promoted more considerably  
(because it leads) to abstention from killing  
animals.

Now for the following purpose has this been ordered  
that it may last as long as (my) sons and great-  
grandsons (shall reign and) as long as the moon  
and the sun (shall shine), and in order that (men)  
may conform to it.

For if one conforms to this, (happiness) in this (world) and in the other (world) will be attained.

This rescript on morality was caused to be written by me (when I had been) anointed twenty-seven years.

Concerning this, Devanampriya says:

This rescript on morality must be engraved there, where either stone pillars or stone slabs are (available), in order that this may be of long duration."

*The Seventh Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

(14) TOLERANCE TOWARDS ALL SECTS

"King Devanampriya Priyadaršin desires' (that) all sects may reside everywhere.

(For) all these desire both self-control and purity of mind.

But men possess various desires (and) various passions.

Either they will fulfil the whole, or they will fulfil (only) a portion (of their duties).

But even one who (practises) great liberality, (but) does not possess self-control, purity of mind, gratitude, and firm devotion, is very mean."

*The Seventh Girnar Rock Edict ✓*

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin is honouring all sects: both ascetics and householders; both with gifts and with honours of various kinds he is honouring them.

But Devanampriya does not value either gifts or honours so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that a promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place.

But a promotion of the essentials (is possible) in many ways.

But its root is this, viz. guarding (one's) speech, (i. e.) that neither praising one's own sect nor blaming other sects should take place on improper occasions, or (that) it should be moderate in every case.

But other sects ought to be duly honoured in every case. ✓

If one is acting thus, he is both promoting his own sect and benefiting other sects.

If one is acting otherwise than thus, he is both hurting his own sect and wronging other sects as well.

For whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects,—all (this) out of devotion to his own sect, (i. e.) with the view of glorifying his own sect,—if he is acting thus, he rather injures his own sect very severely.

Therefore concord alone is meritorious, (i. e.) that they should both hear and obey each other's morals.

For this is the desire of Devanampriya, (viz.) that all sects should be full of learning, and should be pure in doctrine.

And those who are attached to their respective (sects) ought to be spoken to (as follows).

Devanampriya does not value either gifts or honours so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that a promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place.

And many (officers) are occupied for this purpose, (viz.) the MAHAMATRAS of morality, the MAHAMATRAS controlling women, the inspectors of cowpens, and other classes (of officials).

And this is the fruit of it, (viz.) that both the promotion of one's own sect takes place, and the glorification of morality."

*The Twelfth Girnar Rock Edict*

(16) NON-KILLING

"This rescript on morality has been caused to be written by King Devanampriya Priyadarsin.

Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed:

And no festival meeting must be held.

For King Devanampriya Priyadarsin sees much evil in festival meetings.

But there are also some festival meetings which are considered meritorious by King Devanampriya Priyadarsin.

Formerly in the kitchen of King Devanampriya Priyadarsin many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for the sake of curry.

But now, when this rescript on morality is written, only three animals are being killed (daily) for the

sake of curry, (viz.) two peacocks (and) one deer, (but) even this deer not regularly.

Even these three animals shall not be killed in future."

*The First Girnar Rock Edict*

(16) INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFICERS

" King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus :

(When I had been) anointed twelve years, the following was ordered by me.

Everywhere in my dominions the YUKTAS, the RAJUKA, and the PRADESIKA shall set out on a complete tour (throughout their charges) every five years for this very purpose, (viz.) for the following instruction in morality as well as for other business.

' Meritorious is obedience to mother and father. Liberality to friends, acquaintances, and relatives, to Brahmanas and Sramanas is meritorious. Abstinence from killing animals is meritorious. Moderation in expenditure (and) moderation in possessions are meritorious.'

The council (of MAHAMATRAS) also shall order the YUKTAS to register (these rules) both with (the addition of) reasons and according to the letter."

*The Third Girnar Rock Edict*

“ King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus:

This rescript on morality was caused to be written by me (when I had been) anointed twenty-six years.

My LAJUKAS are occupied with the people, with many hundred thousands of men.

I have ordered that either rewards or punishments are left to their discretion, in order that the LAJUKAS should perform (their) duties confidently (and) fearlessly, that they should bestow welfare and happiness on the people of the country, and that they should confer benefits (on them).

They will know how to cause pleasure and to cause pain (to them), and will exhort the people of the country through those who are devoted to morality, in order that they may attain (happiness) both in this (world) and in the other (world).

The LAJUKAS also must obey me.

They will also obey the agents who know (my) wishes.

And these (agents) will also exhort those (people), in order that the LAJUKAS may be able to please me.

For, as one feels confident after having entrusted (his) child to an intelligent nurse, (thinking): ‘The intelligent nurse will be able to keep my child well, so the LAJUKAS were appointed by me for the welfare and happiness of the country-people.

In order that they should perform (their) duties, being fearless, confident, (and) unperturbed, for this (purpose) I have ordered that either rewards or punishments are left to the discretion of the LAJUKAS.

For the following is to be desired, (viz.) that there should be both impartiality in judicial proceedings and impartiality in punishments.

And my order (reaches) even so far (that) a respite of three days is granted by me to persons lying in prison on whom punishment has been passed, (and) who have been condemned to death.

(In this way) either (their) relatives will persuade those (LAJUKAS) to (grant) their life, or, if there is none who persuades (them), they will undergo fasts in order to (attain happiness) in the other (world).

For my desire is this, that, even when the time (of respite) has expired, they should attain (happiness) in the other (world).

And various moral practices, self-control, (and) the distribution of gifts are (thus) promoted among the people."

*The Fourth Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict*

"At the word of Devanampriya, the MAHAMATRAS at Tosali, (who are) judicial officers of the city, have to tell (thus):

Whatever I recognize (to be right), that I strive to carry out by deeds, and to accomplish by (various) means.

And this is considered by me the principal means for this object, viz. (to give) instruction to you.

For you are occupied with many thousands of men, with the object of gaining the affection of men.

All men are my children.

As on behalf of (my own) children I desire that they may be provided with complete welfare and happiness in this world and in the other world, the same I desire also on behalf of (all) men.

And you do not learn how far this (my) object reaches.

Some single person only learns this, (and) even he (only) a portion, (but) not the whole.

Now you must pay attention to this, although you are well provided for.

It happens in the administration (of justice) that a single person suffers either imprisonment or harsh treatment.

In this case (an order) cancelling the imprisonment is (obtained) by him accidentally, while (many) other people continue to suffer.

In this case you must strive to deal (with all of them) impartially.

But one fails to act (thus) on account of the following dispositions: envy, anger, cruelty, hurry, want of practice, laziness, (and) fatigue.

(You) must strive for this, that these dispositions may not arise to you.

And the root of all this is the absence of anger and the avoidance of hurry.

He who is fatigued in the administration (of justice) will not rise; but one ought to move, to walk, and to advance.

He who will pay attention to this, must tell you: 'See that (you) discharge the debt (which you owe to the king); such and such is the instruction of Devanampriya.

The observance of this produces great fruit, (but its non-observance (becomes) a great evil.

For if one fails to observe this, there will be neither attainment of heaven nor satisfaction of the king.

For how (could) my mind be pleased if one badly fulfils this duty?

But if (you) observe this, you will attain heaven, and you will discharge the debt (which you owe) to me.

And this edict must be listened to (by all) on (every day of) the constellation Tishya.

And it may be listened to even by a single (person) also on frequent (other) occasions between (the days of) Tishya.

And if (you) act thus, you will be able to fulfil (this duty).

For the following purpose has this rescript been written here, (viz.) in order that the judicial officers of the city may strive at all times (for this), (that) neither undeserved fettering nor undeserved harsh treatment are happening to (men).

For the following purpose I shall send out every five years (a MAHAMATRA) who will be neither harsh nor fierce, (but) of gentle actions, (viz. in order to ascertain) whether (the judicial officers), paying attention to this subject, are acting as my instruction (implies).

....                      ....                      ....                      ....

When these MAHAMATRAS will be sent out on tour, then, without neglecting their duties, they will ascertain this as well, (viz.) whether (the judicial officers) are carrying out this also, as the instruction of the king (implies).

*The First Separate Dhauli Rock Edict*

(17) EXTRA-TERRITORIAL ACTIVITY IN REGARD  
TO 'UNCONQUERED BORDERERS'

" ....      ....      .... It might occur to (my) unconquered borderers (to ask): 'What does the king desire with reference to us?'

(This) alone is my wish with reference to the borderers that they may learn that Devanampriya.....that they may not be afraid of me, but may have confidence (in me); that they may obtain only happiness from me, not misery; that they may (learn) this, that Devanampriya will forgive them what can be forgiven; that they may (be induced) by me (to) practise morality; (and) that they may attain (happiness in) this world and (in) the other world.

For the following purpose I am instructing you, (viz. that) I may discharge the debt (which I owe to them) by this, that I instruct (you) and inform (you) of (my) will, i. e. my unshakable resolution and vow.

Therefore, acting thus, (you) must fulfil (your) duty and must inspire confidence to them, in order that they may learn that Devanampriya is to them like

a father, that Devanampriya loves them like himself, and that they are to Devanampriya like (his own) children.

Therefore, having instructed (you), and having informed you of (my) will, I shall have (i. e. entertain) officers in (all) provinces for this object.

For you are able to inspire confidence to those (borderers) and (to secure their) welfare and happiness in this world and in the other world.

And if (you) act thus, you will attain heaven, and will discharge the debt (which you owe) to me.

And for the following purpose has this rescript been written here, (viz.) in order that the MAHA-MATRAS may strive at all times to inspire confidence to those borderers (of mine) and (to induce them) to practise morality,

....

If (you) act thus, you will be able to carry out (my orders).

*The Second Separate Dhauli Rock Edict*

(18) RESULTS OF WAR

"When King Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by (him.)

One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who are slain there, and many times as many those who died.

After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality.

This is the repentance of Devanampriya on account of his conquest of (the country of the Kalingas).

For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Devanampriya, that, while one is conquering an unconquered (country), slaughter, death, and deportation of people (are taking place) there.

But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Devanampriya.

(To) the Brahmanas or Sramanas, or other sects or householders, who are living there, (and) among whom the following are practised: obedience to those who receive high pay, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slaves and servants, (and) firm devotion,—to these then happen injury or slaughter or deportation of (their) beloved ones.

Or, if there are then incurring misfortune the friends acquaintances, companions, and relatives of those whose affection (for the latter) is undiminished, although they are (themselves) well provided for, this (misfortune) as well becomes an injury to those (persons) themselves.

This is shared by all men and is considered deplorable by Devanampriya.

And there is no (place where men) are not attached to some sect.

Therefore even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Devanampriya.

And Devanampriya thinks that even (to one) who should wrong (him), what can be forgiven is to be forgiven.

And even (the inhabitants of) the forests which are (included) in the dominions of Devanampriya, even those he pacifies (and) converts.

And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Devanampriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and may not be killed.

For Devanampriya desires towards all beings abstinence from hurting, self-control, (and) impartiality in (case of) violence.

And this conquest is considered the principal one by Devanampriya, viz. the conquest of morality.

....

....

....

....

And for the following purpose has this rescript on morality been written, (viz.) in order that the sons (and) great-grandsons (who) may be (born) to me, should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made, (that), if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments and (that) they should regard the conquest of morality as the only (true) conquest.

This (conquest bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.

And let there be (to them) pleasure in the abandonment of all (other aims), which is pleasure in morality.

For this (bear fruit) in this world (and) in the other world."

*The Thirteenth Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict*







